

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
February 21, 2017
Testimony from Nancy Sarra- Superintendent, New Britain

Co-Chairs Sen. Osten, Sen. Formica, Rep. Walker; Ranking Member Rep. Ziobron; and members of the Appropriations Committee,

As the leader of the Consolidated School District of New Britain, I am grateful to have the opportunity to submit this testimony and to tell you our story. New Britain has 18 public schools, educating 10,150 students. We employ 1,632 people, including 802 teachers.

New Britain is one of the most diverse communities in Connecticut. Our students come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and 61 languages are spoken in our schools. The district has implemented the USDA Community Eligibility Provision, which is an option for high poverty school districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without the burden of collecting household applications. Instead, meal reimbursement levels are based on students whose families are participating in other federal programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The Consolidated School District of New Britain's current reimbursement rate is 100% based on the percentage of families that reside in New Britain that participate in qualifying federal programs.

New Britain annually ranks near the bottom as to school funding in CT. As examples, for 2015-2016, the preliminary per pupil expenditures has New Britain ranked 164 out of 166 reporting school districts at per pupil expenditure of \$13,196. For 2014-2015, New Britain per pupil expenditures were \$13,033 which were \$2,682 below the state average of \$15,715 for the 169 school districts and \$3,039 below the DRG I for the poorest 7 school districts average of \$16,072.

The work of running a school district as complex as New Britain is both challenging and rewarding. In addition to overall poverty in our city, there are areas of concentrated poverty in New Britain that require additional services and resources so we are able to provide an equitable education for all of our students. However, persistent deficits over the past decade have significantly hampered our ability to grow and enhance the services we can offer our students. While our state and local leaders have done their best to preserve our funding, we know that the current economic crisis facing Connecticut poses a real threat to New Britain public schools.

To put it plainly: If our district receives any cuts to education funding, it will have a tangible, negative impact on our schools—and on our kids. While we understand that the state budget is in crisis, this cannot be the time that we back away from our commitment to Connecticut's students—especially those who depend on state and local government the most.

I know that the Appropriations Committee has a long history of protecting education funding for our schools, and that there is a deep understanding that kids with more learning needs require additional consideration. As you weigh the difficult choices ahead, I respectfully urge you to hold the line on education funding. This is a critical moment for our kids, and to back away from our shared commitment to them would be detrimental to their success and would diminish their ability to become productive working contributors to our state.

Furthermore, since it is likely that this Committee will contemplate a change to our school funding formula, I also ask you to consider including in measures that account for the additional learning needs that many of my students have. The funding formula proposed by the governor counts the

number of students using Husky A as the measure for low income students, and this captures more than does the previous measure used (free and reduced price lunch recipients). This is a step in the right direction, but we should not stop here. We should consider other student learning needs and the impact they have on resources—the most important of these being the number of students who are English Language Learners. Only when our formula truly captures the population of kids we are educating will we be finally funding our schools appropriately.

I thank you for your consideration of my testimony and for your ongoing advocacy on behalf of our state's public school students. If I can be of any further assistance to the Committee as you make your decisions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Respectfully,
Nancy Sarra- Superintendent, New Britain